

## **Ventura County Star**

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### **County, cities set 10-year housing goals**

Deal hailed as harbinger of cooperation

**By Charles Levin, [clevin@VenturaCountyStar.com](mailto:clevin@VenturaCountyStar.com)**

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Officials for Ventura County and its 10 cities have agreed on the number of housing units each should accommodate over the next 10 years.

The Ventura Council of Governments approved the plan Tuesday, a day after city managers refined a recommendation by planners from local agencies.

Planning officials and city managers hailed the agreement, saying it was a harbinger of future countywide cooperation on housing and other issues.

"It's the first time in anybody's memory that it actually worked out that way," Santa Paula City Manager Wally Bobkiewicz, the council's interim executive director, said Wednesday. "Everyone was going into this figuring there would be winners and losers."

The decision does not bind the cities to approve specific numbers of housing units. Instead, each agency must only show that it has enough land designated for its assigned number, said Chris Stephens, director of the Ventura County Resource Management Agency.

Typically, the Southern California Association of Governments, or SCAG, sets housing goals for the county as a whole, as well as each city's share, to meet the demands of projected population growth.

But this year, several local cities objected to SCAG's numbers, so they elected to design their own plan under an option provided by SCAG, Stephens said.

The locally drawn plan might also provide another important advantage, Bobkiewicz said. When SCAG sets the numbers, a county can appeal its assigned share. If it wins and the number is reduced, the difference can be transferred to another county, Bobkiewicz said.

SCAG officials have promised that Ventura County and its 10 cities, because they sculpted their own numbers, will be immune from any such transfers, Stephens said.

Under the plan approved Tuesday, the county and 10 cities must have designated enough land for 28,481 new housing between 2005 and 2014, Bobkiewicz said. Oxnard tops the list with 7,564 units, while Port Hueneme came up last with 198.

"We're fine," said Chris Williamson, an Oxnard senior planner. For its goal, Oxnard can apply about 800 units it has already approved over the past 18 months, Williamson said.

'Good agreement,' official says

Simi Valley City Manager Mike Sedell called the pact a "good agreement that no one likes but everyone needs to live with."

Trying to meet the housing goals often flies in the face of local ordinances and zoning laws, Sedell said. But the cities and county agreed to share the pain.

The pact also will include goals for providing more affordable housing. Those numbers will not be available until later this month or early next month, Williamson said.

Whether the county and 10 cities can achieve the housing goals is unclear. By state law, the numbers must be incorporated into each agency's state-mandated "housing element." They also become part of every government's general plan, a blueprint for future growth.

There's no state penalty for noncompliance, but cities and the county are susceptible to legal challenges by affordable housing advocates and others, Bobkiewicz said.

In the early 1990s, when the housing market slowed and developers weren't building homes, local governments did not meet a similar set of goals, Stephens said.

"Even with these numbers, there's different legislative will in every community, and there's no consistency there," Bobkiewicz said. "There are 11 different stories. Some say, 'Why does the state tell us what to do? We should do what makes sense for our community.' There is a bit of a disconnect."

Work started in October

The 11 local agencies had been hashing out the target numbers since October. The process was difficult because the amount of available land continues to shrink, Stephens said.

"The next (time) will be even more challenging," Stephens said, "because there's less vacant urban land available to put this housing that the state tells us we need to accommodate."